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English History Reading Books

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ALFRED THE GREAT

AND

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

BY

F. YORK POWELL, M.A.

LAW LECTURER, CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD  
LATE PUBLIC EXAMINER, UNIVERSITY, OXFORD



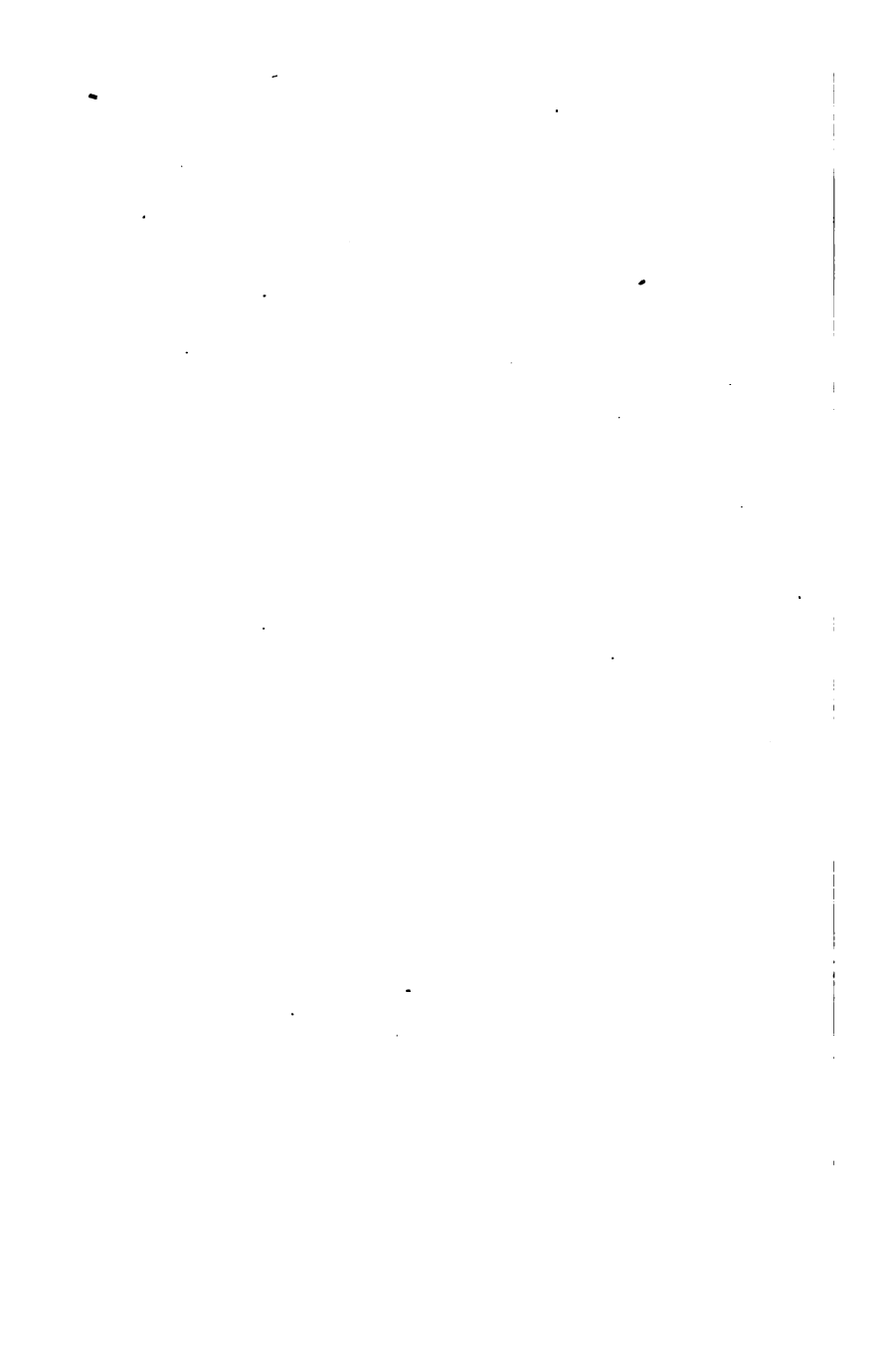
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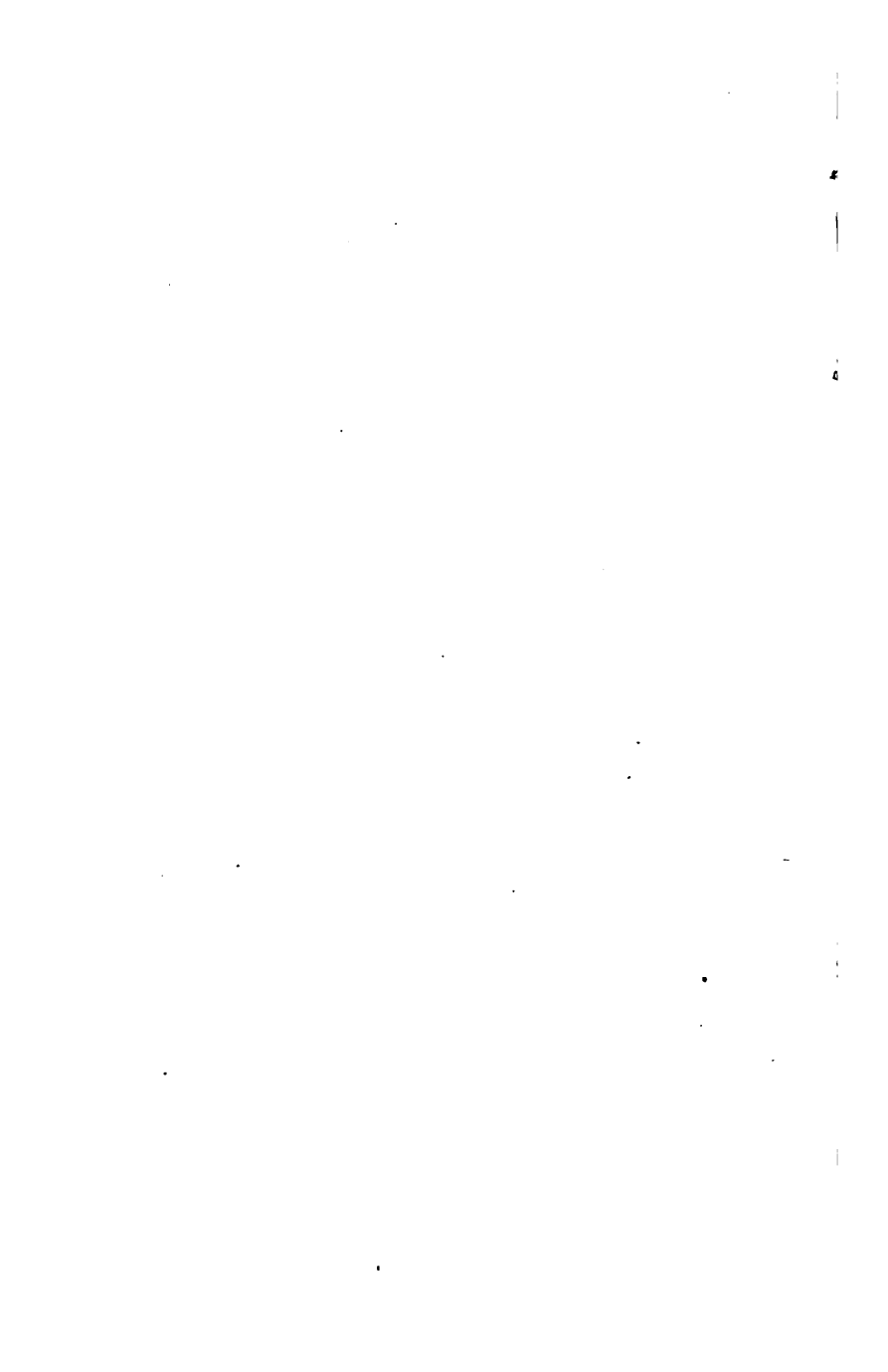


## PREFACE.

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IN a Reading Book of this size, written for children, only the main points of the story can be set forth. Many things interesting and important in themselves are therefore of necessity omitted. Thus, though the Norman Conquest of England must be told of, the Norman Conquest of South Italy and Sicily must be passed over. Where so much might be said, the chief difficulty has been to choose what to say. Teachers who care to work up this period of history (one which is well adapted for *vivâ voce* lessons, dictation, and the like) may find the Map of Normandy and Note on Books useful. They will be able to supplement what is here said with further information from the original authorities upon which this little book is based.





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## GOOD KING ALFRED.

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1. **Old England and England to-day.**—More than one thousand years ago, when good King Alfred was born, this England we live in was in many ways very unlike what it is to-day. You may now see great cities, such as London or Liverpool, covering miles of ground with their fine paved streets and long rows of tall houses of brick and stone. In these cities there are huge factories, too, and warehouses and stations, and handsome public buildings, schools, museums, law courts, and the like, thronged every day with hundreds of busy people. But then you could have looked over broad stretches of wild moor, or forest, or fen, where the only sign of man that met your eye would be the low wooden church-tower of a little hamlet made up of a few scattered farms, or perhaps the tall brick gateway or high-peaked tiled roofs of a small town of a

few hundred souls. Where railroads and canals now run with their never-ceasing traffic, you would then only have seen a string of small packhorses picking their way along a lonely grass-grown road, or a single flat boat being worked slowly up the river by a few ragged-looking men with poles. You may now stand on a splendid stone quay looking over great docks, thronged with sailing-vessels and steamships of every flag, whose crowded masts and funnels look like the trees of some great forest growing upon the water. But you would in those days have seen in their place only waste salt marshes by the shore, and at the river mouth a few wooden sheds and fishermen's huts, and two or three small boats lying side by side on the beach below them. Or, perhaps, a gaily-painted galley, no bigger than a coal-barge, might be lying housed in its boatshed by the water side. For in those days there were fewer people in England, not more than one-fifteenth as many as there are now, and these did not live by trade or manufacture as most of us do now, but by farming. What was needed in the way of clothes, or furniture, or tools each household made for itself, so that even rich and well-born people lived very plainly and lacked many comforts which even

poor folk now-a-days would think it very hard to go without.

**2. The King's Farm at Wantage.**—King Ethelwolf's farm at Wantage, in which his youngest son Alfred was born in the spring of the year 849, has long been destroyed, but from stories and pictures in old English parchment books, we can tell what kind of place it must have been. In a large court-yard, paved round with a high and strong fence, there stood a group of buildings. One of them built of wood, and roofed with red tiles, like the rest, is the church, as can easily be seen by its tall, cross-topped steeple, with its fine gilt weathercock. This church is small and dark inside, for it is lit only by a few small panes of coloured glass in the clerestory, and a little gold lamp that swings above the altar, on which is placed a small jewelled cross and a beautifully bound service-book. The door is always open, but a handsome curtain is hung before it to keep out the rain and wind. Near the door stands a carved stone font. There is neither pew nor pulpit; the priest preaches from the altar steps, and the people stand or kneel on the bare wooden floor.

**3. The Hall.**—That large, long, barn-like building, with the deers' horns fixed to the

gable ends is the hall, where the king is keeping the christening feast this evening. Its wainscoted walls are hung with shields, and spears, and swords, and bows. It is lit by torches; and there is a great fire of logs burning on a stone hearth in the middle of the room, from which the smoke is curling up through an opening in the roof. There are two long tables running along the hall from end to end, and at one of them sits King Ethelwolf, in his great carved chair. Opposite to him is his white-haired counsellor, and by his side Bishop Swithin, who has christened the little Alfred to-day, and the *alderman* or governor of the shire. Two of the young princes, handsome lads, are chatting merrily together near their father. On a chair by the fire sits the harper; the rest of the king's men in due order fill the benches round the tables.

**4. The Dinner and the Company.**—The servants have taken away the meat, which has been handed round on wooden spits for each man to cut his share with his own belt knife. The broken bread is being carried out in baskets for the beggars who are waiting at the gate of the court-yard for their daily meal. The cupbearers are serving round the wine,

and beer, and mead in large silver-mounted horns and gilt cups which they fill at the carved wooden vats that are ranged on a side table. Over his tunic and hose the king wears a long silk gown, brodered with figures of birds and beasts worked in gold thread; his ivory-hilted sword hangs from a studded belt by his side. The noblemen and gentle-



A LADY AND GENTLEMAN IN ALFRED'S TIME.

folk wear gay scarlet or blue tunics of fine cloth, and woollen hose. Their arms are laden with gold and silver bracelets, their hair and beards are long, and their throats and hands are tattooed.

The talking and laughter go on cheerily



and healths are drunk to the king and his new-born son. Then Ethelwulf bids the harper sing, and all listen in silence.

5. **The Harper's Song.**—The old man chants the famous old story of Beowulf the Goth, who slew the man-eating fiend Grendel, and his ogress mother, and freed King Rothgar from their midnight hauntings. He sings, too, how Beowulf became a king himself after many wonderful deeds of bravery, and how he ruled his people well for many a long year till in his old age he went forth to fight a dreadful dragon that lived in a cave full of treasures. This dragon he killed, and won the hoard, but died of the wounds he got in the struggle. The harper winds up his story by telling of the splendid funeral Beowulf's sorrowing people gave him, raising a lofty mound above his grave, which still serves as a landmark to the sailors of the Danish Sound. When the song is done the king sends the harper a cup of wine and a gold ring off his own arm as a fee for his singing. Soon afterwards the feast breaks up, for the king and the bishop are sober men, and do not like the heavy drinking which Englishmen were too fond of in those days. The tables are put aside and the company lie down to sleep in their cloaks and

rugs upon the benches or the floor. The king having seen the guards posted at the gates of the courtyard, goes off to bed in the upper chamber at the end of the hall.

**6. The Ladies' Bower.**—Besides the church and the hall there are other buildings in the courtyard. The chief of them is the *ladies' bower*, where the king's wife and her ladies and maids work and sleep. It is smaller than the hall, but lit and warmed in the same way. There is little furniture in it—only tables, benches, and a large chest or two for holding the plate and linen. But there is a loom at one end, and there are carding-combs and spinning-wheels, and distaffs, and a heap of fresh-washed wool, and hanks of thread and bags of needlework. For there were no cloth factories, or drapers' stores, or tailors' shops in those days, and ladies used to make their husbands' and brothers' clothes. In a little chamber at the other end of the bower, hung round with tapestry, are the king's wife and her babe sleeping in a wooden cot.

**7. Kitchen and Store-houses.**—We must not forget the kitchen—a rough log-built shed, standing apart, for fear of fire. Here the meat is boiled in large brazen cauldrons or roasted on large iron spits over the fire, and the thin cakes

of oatmeal or barleymeal are baked on the hot hearth. Here, too, are the brewing vats and the butchers' blocks and knives, and the stone hand-mills worked by the women slaves. For in those days gentlefolks brewed their own beer, and dressed their meat, and ground their corn at home. Next the kitchen stands the smith's forge, where all the metal-work that is wanted on the estate is done. The smith is a clever workman, and can make a handsome gold ring or necklace, forge a sword-blade or axe-head, or turn out a wheel or a plow-share, or a set of bolts or chains. Away from these are the barns in which are stowed sacks of oats, and rye, and barley, and casks full of salt beef, and pork, and fish; vats of ale and mead, and a few barrels of French wine. A goodly row of fitches and hams hangs from the roof-beams above. There are also a few bags of salt, and spices; and a number of large earthen crocks full of honey are carefully ranged in a corner, for in those days people could not get sugar from over sea, and had to sweeten their food with honey.

8. **The Out-houses and Byres.**—The cow-byres and sheepfold, and ox-stalls, are by the gate of the court-yard, and they are not so big as you would suppose for such a large house-

hold as lived on the farm. But it was impossible in those days to keep many cattle through the winter for lack of hay to feed them on. So that in November and October, people were obliged to kill many of their sheep and cattle, and salt as much meat as would last them through the winter. Then there are the stables, which, like the byres, are mere sheds of hurdles, thatched with furze and bracken. They hold the king's riding-horses only, for there were no carriages or cars then, and wagons and plows were drawn by oxen. There is the dairy too, with its earthen pans of cow's milk and sheep's milk and vats of buttermilk, a pile of cheeses, and a few crocks full of butter.

9. *The Court-yard.*—Not far from the gate of the court-yard is a draw-well, and by it a great stack of firewood (no one burnt coal then), and next to it are the stocks and whipping-post for the punishment of disobedient slaves or sturdy beggars. There are five or six goats and a flock of geese wandering about the yard; and a number of dogs, greyhounds, wolf-hounds, boar-hounds, and a mastiff or two, are lying at the doors of the cook-house or in front of the hall fire. On perches in the hall-porch sit some very sleepy

hawks with hoods on their heads and bells on their feet. Only the servants—grooms, cooks, and herdsmen—sleep in the yard buildings. The farm labourers live in little wattled cabins outside the fence. Many of them are slaves, barefooted and bareheaded, with close-cropped hair, and iron collars round their necks. You will miss the beautiful flower-gardens and glass-houses of the great country mansions of our days; but inside a hedge of hawthorn there is a little orchard and a patch of garden ground. Here are sunflowers and onions, potherbs and roses, kale and gilliflowers, all growing side by side; and there is a row of vines trained over poles.

**10. Life in England a Thousand Years ago.**  
—Such was an English gentleman's homestead a thousand years ago. The farmers differed from the noblemen in having smaller buildings, fewer cattle and sheep, and less breadth of land. But they led much the same lives, ate the same kind of food, and knew equally little about books or learning, or anything else outside their daily round of duty. This, indeed, -gave them plenty to do and think about, if they went properly to work. In the spring, ploughing, and sowing, and harrowing must be done, and the flocks and

herds tended. In the summer the hay must be got in; and in the autumn came the harvest. Then a stock of meat, and ale, and firewood, and salt fish, had to be laid in against the winter. Winter was the time for wood-felling, and hunting and fowling, and for such indoor work as wagon-building, and smith's work, and carpentry, the making or mending of tools, weapons, harness, clothes, and the like. But the year was not wholly given up to work; there were holidays too. At Yule or Christmastide there was great merry-making for a fortnight. At midsummer there were races and games, and the courts sat, and public business was done, and there were fairs and markets held. In the spring there were courts and fairs to attend, and the autumn brought harvest-home. There were half-holidays, too, on the days of such favourite saints as the Apostle Peter, the soldiers' saint Martin, and the missionaries Augustine and Cuthbert. Such was the kind of place and life to which Alfred, Ethelwolf's son, was born.

**11. Alfred's Boyhood.**—Alfred was a bright quick little fellow, the darling of his father and mother, for he promised to become handsomer and more clever than any of his

brothers. He was fond of play, and never tired of going about the yard with the falconers and huntsmen. But his greatest delight was to sit and listen to the harper's singing, or to hear some aged man or woman telling old stories by the fireside of an evening. One day his mother, Osburg, was showing a beautifully written song-book to him and his brothers, and they were delighted with the initial letter, which was gaily painted in colours, and had little figures of birds and snakes twisted round it in a very curious way. Seeing their pleasure, Osburg said, 'I will give this book to the first of you that will learn the songs in it by heart.' 'Will you really do so, mother?' cried Alfred very eagerly. 'Yes, that I will,' answered his mother, laughing. The little fellow took the book, and ran off at once to the priest, and begged him to read it to him, for he could not yet read himself. In this way he very soon got all the songs in the book by heart, and was able to go to his mother and repeat them, and win the beautiful book he had longed for so much. He learnt many prayers, too, by heart, and the daily service, and many of the Psalms.

12. **Alfred sent to Rome.**—But his father, Ethelwolf, unlike most gentlemen of his time,

had a great respect for learning. He had been carefully brought up by clergymen, who were the only people in those days that could read books, or understand Greek and Latin, in which tongues all that was then known of learning and medicine, and many useful arts, was written. He therefore made up his mind that, as there were few good teachers in England, he would send his son to Rome, for his good friend the pope to bring him up. The pope was kind to the child, who was then only five years old, and gave him good masters, and took care of him. Alfred seems to have come home in 855. But his father afterwards left his kingdom to the care of his eldest son and his counsellors, and, taking Alfred with him, journeyed to Rome to talk with the pope and the learned clergy there, and to pray at the famous churches. They were welcomed and treated with great kindness, and Ethelwolf gave the poor money, and the churches many rich gifts—gold plates, and cups, and rings, and raiment of silk and purple. He also rebuilt the English School in Rome, which his forefathers had founded. When he went home Alfred stayed behind till after his father's death. Then the pope blessed Alfred, and



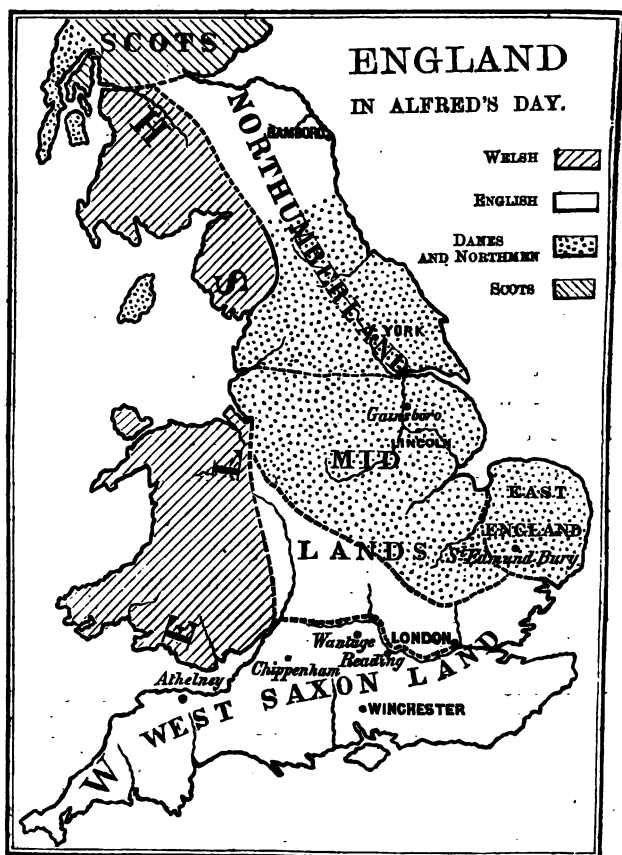
anointed him, believing that he would one day be king, and sent him back to his own land. Alfred had learnt much abroad, no doubt, though he was only a child. He had learnt how to speak Latin, and he had seen many wonderful things—the great Alps, the beautiful rivers of Italy and Germany, and the splendid Italian cities, far larger and grander than any town in England. Above all, he had seen Rome itself, with its beautiful buildings, its huge cathedrals, and the vast ruins of theatres, and baths, and palaces, which made it look like some enchanted place in Fairyland to the wondering English pilgrims. There, too, Alfred saw many trades which were unknown in England, and he never forgot what he had seen, but treasured it up in his mind for use in time to come.

**13. Alfred's Youth.**—While his elder brethren were reigning, one after the other, Alfred seems to have lived with his favourite brother Ethelred. He led an active life, being very fond of sport, and very skilful in finding and killing all kinds of wild beasts. He tracked and slew the greedy wolves and foxes that ravaged the sheepfolds, and he shot down the deer and wild oxen with his arrows so that the household might have fresh meat

now and again in the winter. He was always fond of hounds, and hawks, and horses, and spent much time in training them. He also liked watching the smith and carpenter at their work, and talking to them of the great buildings, and fair carvings, and fine jewellery and weapons he had seen abroad. But his great desire all through his youth was to become a great soldier, and fight for his country against the cruel foes that were putting her in danger.

**14. Egbert Overlord of England.**—At that time, you must know, the Scots, and Irish, and Welsh were not under one English government as nowadays, but had kings of their own. Even England itself was divided into four little separate kingdoms, as you may see by the map on the next page.

All these kings, as you may guess, often fell out and made war upon each other, or against their foreign neighbours, in spite of all that the bishops could do to make them keep at peace; and there was a good deal of bloodshed, which no one was the better for. But at last Alfred's grandfather, Egbert, who had been trained by the Emperor Charles the Great, and was a wiser man and a better soldier than any other king of his day, forced the other English kings to take him as



their lord, and rule as he wished. So he and his sons after him became overkings of all England, though the Northumbrians and East English and Midland English still had kings of their own, but they were under Egbert, and obeyed him and his sons.

15. *The Danes.*—However, just as Egbert had thus begun to bring all the land under one peaceful rule, there arose against him new and dreadful enemies. These were Danes and Northmen, who in his days first began to come as pirates, or *Wickings*, as they called it—that is, men of the *Bay* or *Wick*—to the British Islands.

They were of the same stock as the English, but had gone to live in the lands east of the North Sea, while the English crossed it and came to Britain. In speech and ways they were still much alike. But there was now a difference between them in religion, for these Northmen and Danes were still heathen, believing in the old gods whom the English had long ceased to worship. They prayed to the sun and moon, and to Tew, and Woden, and Thunder, and Freya, after whom we still name the days of the week. They lived in wilder, colder, and less fruitful lands than England. But after a while they

found out that there were rich fair countries lying across the water, where the people lived in open villages, that an enemy could easily enter. They then fitted out great fleets of pirate ships, and sailed across to the coasts of the British islands every summer in search of plunder, bearing back with them great booty of jewels and gold, and precious raiment and slaves.

**16. The Danish Ships.**—The Danish ships were more than seventy feet long and sixteen wide, bigger and better than any vessels the English had. They had one mast with a large square sail, their stem and stern were high, and the bows ended in tall beams, which were often carved into the shape of dragons' heads. They were brightly painted with yellow and red and black; and there was a row of round shields hung on either side, to shelter the crew from weapons or waves. They had long oars, too, such as we now call *sweeps*, so that they could get along very fast even in a calm. There was a small cabin under the deck in the bows and at the stern, and a narrow deck running between them, leaving room for the rowers' seats on each side. The captain used to stand by the steersman, giving his orders and keeping an eye on

the sail. The pick of the crew were placed on the foredeck, so that they might be foremost in any danger. There was very strict discipline kept up on board, and only the best sailors and bravest soldiers were chosen to man these war-ships. You may easily fancy the terror that was caused when the brightly-striped sails and gay flag of a *wicking's* ship were spied in the offing. The English, of course, did not let themselves be robbed and ill-treated without resisting. The summons would be carried round the shire by swift messengers for every household to send an armed man to join the *militia*. When they were all in arms, and marching down to the shore, they would often hear that the pirate fleet, after burning and plundering a village or two, had sailed away to another part of the coast, where they were not expected. Thus, by their swift movements, the Danes contrived to do great harm at little danger to themselves. Egbert and Ethelwolf were able to beat them, and keep their own West Saxon kingdom safe; but there was hardly a church or village on the east coast that had not been plundered or burnt, for the *wickings* destroyed all that was not too hot or too heavy for them to bear away.

17. **The Danes come to settle.**—While Alfred's elder brethren were alive, the Danes left England alone, for they were taken up with plundering the French and Dutch coasts. But soon after Ethelred was crowned, Hingwar and Hubba his brother, the sons of a famous pirate king, Ragnar, who had been taken prisoner and slain by the English, came with a great host to England. They took York, killed the king who had put their father to death, and forced the Northumbrians to take them as overlords. They then marched into the Midlands, and seized Nottingham, meaning to stop there through the winter. For these kings had not come merely for booty, but to try and win some part of the British Islands to settle and dwell in. Burgred, King of the Midland English, who had married one of the daughters of Ethelwolf his overlord, sent to his brothers-in-law for help. The West Saxon king and his brother set out with their army to Nottingham, and blockaded Hingwar and his Danes. But Hingwar by his fair words craftily led the young king to let him go free, on his promise to leave the Midlands in peace. So Ethelred and Alfred came home, and Hingwar afterwards went off to East England, where he took the brave East English

King Edmund prisoner, and put him to a cruel death, because he would not cast off the Christian faith. Edmund was buried at the town that is still called after him, and was highly honoured as a saint by the English.

**18. Alfred's Marriage.**—When Alfred was twenty years old he married Ealswith, the daughter of Alderman Ethelred the Big, of Gainsborough. This was a happy match, for both he and his wife were good people. Alfred was strong enough in body, but he had never had very good health; and now, on the very day of the wedding, he was seized by an illness which he could never after get wholly rid of. Yet he never let it stand in the way of his daily duty, in spite of the pain it often gave him.

**19. The Battle of Ashdown, 871.**—Alfred and Ethelred, who were always together, and shared the rule of the land, were not left long in quiet. News was brought them in 871 that a host of Danes had come up to Reading, and were laying waste their kingdom. Starting off to the rescue, they met the Danish host at *Ashdown*, and both sides made ready for the battle. Alfred, with half the English, were to fight against the Danish earls and their men, while Ethelred withstood their two



heathen kings, Halfdan and Bagseg. The Danes were drawn up along the top of the downs, and the English in the valley below them. Before the battle began, King Ethelred halted his men, and went into his tent to pray for victory. While he was praying, the Danish earls and their men charged down upon Alfred, who had drawn up his little army in the shape of a wedge, bidding them keep their shields together and stand shoulder to shoulder against the enemy. News came to Ethelred that the battle was joined; but he would not stir till his prayers were finished, though the heathen kings now pushed into the fight, and Alfred was hard pressed. But when the last Amen was said, he ran out sure of victory, and led his men into the thick of the fray, where he slew the heathen king Bagseg with his own hand. After a hard struggle, which raged till nightfall, round the hoar hawthorn that grew on the brow of the downs, the English drove the Danes off the field. This was Alfred's first great battle, and he won great honour for the skill and courage with which he had upheld the fight single-handed so long.

**20. Alfred becomes King.**—But the danger was not over. Battle after battle was fought, in

one of which King Ethelred got his death wound, ten weeks after *Ashdown* fight. He was buried at Wimborne, and the English chose Alfred as king after him. It was not a very happy state of things for the new king to begin with, and there was little time for merry-making over his crowning, for the Danish army was still in Surrey, and Alfred was obliged to be at the head of his army nearly all that year. And when the English did get a short peace it was only the worse for them afterwards, for it gave time for their enemies to gather fresh strength from abroad. Nor could the oaths of the Danes be trusted ; for when they had sworn before on their *Holy Ring*, in heathen fashion, to leave Alfred's kingdom, they broke their promises, and tried to seize some of his towns to live in. It would take too long to tell you all the fighting that took place and the trouble King Alfred had to guard his kingdom. In a few years the West Saxons' land was the only part of England which the Danish kings had not conquered or settled. Hubba was ruling in East England ; Halfdan in York ; and King Guthrum, at the head of a third host of heathen, had driven King Burgred out of the Midlands, and taken part of it for his own men. This time Alfred had not

been able to help his brother-in-law, for he was hard pressed himself. So poor Burgred went off to Rome, to pass the rest of his life in prayer and good works, far away from the cruelties and bloodshed from which he had not been able to save his people, and there he soon died.

21. **Alfred forced to fly to Athelney.**—A few years afterwards King Guthrum came against Alfred with a great army. Alfred's people were filled with fright; many in despair fled over the sea to France; others refused to fight, saying that all their fighting in the past had been useless, and that it was no good trying to withstand the Danes. So that it looked as if Alfred would lose his kingdom, as his brother-in-law had done, and that the heathen would rule over all England. But Alfred did not give up all hope: he knew that a man must not look for help if he does not help himself. When he found that the little band of faithful followers that stood by him were too few to fight Guthrum, he made his way with them to Athelney, an island in the marshes of the Parret, a little river in Somerset. There he built a little fort, and waited in hiding till he could gather more men. Of his doings while here many stories are told. He and his men had

not always enough to eat, and he was obliged to go out hunting and fishing, to get food for himself and the others.

**22. Alfred and the Cowherd's Wife.**—One day he came hungry and tired to the hut of one of his cowherds, and asked for shelter. The man was out; but his wife, who did not know the King, let him come in and sit down by the fire. She set him to watch the barley cakes that were baking on the hearth, while she was busy in the other room. Alfred sat down, and amused himself with putting a new string to his bow, and fixing fresh feathers to his arrows, thinking the while over his troubles and plans, and forgetting all about the cakes. However, a strong smell of burning soon brought in the goodwife, who scolded the King roundly for his carelessness, saying that though he was too lazy to turn the cakes she knew very well he would be quick enough to eat them when they were done. Alfred took the reproof very meekly, and said he was sorry for his fault. No doubt afterwards, when the good woman found out who her guest was, she wished she had kept her temper. We also hear of Alfred going, dressed as a harper, to the Danes' camp, to spy out their plans.

23. **Alfred comes back and overcomes Guthrum.**—There is a story, too, of how when they had been three months at Athelney, and the outlook seemed very gloomy, the King was much cheered by a visit from one whom he believed to be S. Cuthbert, who promised him speedy relief. Sure enough a turn came in the King's luck. Hubba with his fleet had sailed to Devonshire, and was plundering the west of Alfred's kingdom, while Guthrum was plundering in the east. Early one morning the Devonshire men attacked the pirate camp and killed Hubba and 1,200 of his men, taking back all the goods that had been stolen from them. They also won the famous banner of the *Raven*, that had been woven in one night by Hubba's three sisters, and was believed to foretell victory by the image of the bird flapping its wings before a battle. Alfred saw that his people had got back their courage, and he left his little fort at once. All Englishmen that could bear arms quickly flocked to his standard, rejoicing to see him again, for it had been noised about that he was dead. Two days afterwards he overcame Guthrum, and drove him, with such of his Danes as were not slain, into their camp. After two weeks' siege, when all their food was eaten, and all their fuel

burnt, Guthrum and his men humbly begged for peace.

**24. Alfred and Guthrum make Peace, 878, at Chippenham.**—Alfred saw that he could not drive the Danes out of England altogether, and knew that in the Midlands and Northumberland they had already settled down among the English. He hoped that if he could win over Guthrum and his men to do the same, they would soon become peaceful neighbours and good Christians, and help him to prevent fresh armies of heathen from coming into the land. So he said that if Guthrum would promise to become his good friend, and leave his kingdom for ever, he would let him and his men go and live in East England. For now that Hubba and most of his men were killed, there was much land lying empty and untilled there. Guthrum, seeing more was to be got from Alfred by peace than war, not only agreed to these terms, but cast off his heathen faith and was baptised with many of his men. Alfred stood godfather to him, and after a few months Guthrum went off to East England, and stayed there at peace with Alfred till his death day.

**25. The Danish Settlement.**—So it came about that in Alfred's days armies of Danes

settled down in the north and east of England, and began to live as peaceful farmers in the villages they had formerly plundered. They married the widows and daughters of the men that they had robbed or slain, and rebuilt the churches they had once wantonly burnt. For in a very few years these warlike pirates became as good Englishmen and as firm Christians as their neighbours. As they were bold seamen, and were not afraid of hard work, they began to make much money by fishing off the coasts, and by carrying goods from place to place in their ships; for the English had not troubled themselves very much with anything except farming. So the country became richer and the towns grew larger. This was the case with London, where there was a great number of Danish and Northern traders and sailors.

**26. Alfred's Justice and Wisdom.**—Up to this time King Alfred had been too busy fighting to do much else; but now that he had a little leisure he set to work to mend all that was wrong in his kingdom, and do as much good as he could. He was a hard-working man, and able to do a great deal in a short time. His great care was to see that his officers and judges did justice, and were upright in all their dealings;

and if he found one of them doing wrong he punished him sternly. Moreover, if he saw one of them unable to carry on the work he had to do, he rebuked him for undertaking a duty he did not know how to fulfil, and bade him learn his work or give place to a better man. He also gave orders for forts to be made in the border towns of his kingdom, to save his people from being suddenly set upon by the Danes. He had great ships built after a plan of his own, bigger and better sea-boats than those of the Danes. And he sent for sailors from Holland to man these ships, and teach his Englishmen how to sail them. This he did because he saw that it was better to fight the Danes at sea, for if they once landed it was hard work to get rid of them. These ships did him good service; but his people were lazy, and thought it too much trouble to make forts against a danger that might never come, so they did not obey him, and soon found out their mistake.

**27. Alfred's School and Teachers.**—Alfred always wished that his people should know as much as he did. But the schools and books had nearly all been destroyed in the wars, and the teachers driven abroad. He was therefore at great pains to gather learned men to his



court, where he set up a school for his own children and the sons of his nobles and gentlemen. Here they were taught to read and write both Latin and English, and to say many English poems, and to get the Psalms by heart. The King sometimes taught the children himself, and took much care of them. When learned men knew that they were sure of a welcome, they came to him from all parts, and he treated them well, and kept them with him, to read to him and to teach his people. Three Wise Men came to him once from Ireland in a very odd way. They built a boat of laths and covered it with oxhide, and put food and water for seven days on board, and let themselves drift in it without sails or oars; and after a week's tossing on the sea their boat came ashore in Cornwall, and they went gladly to see King Alfred.

**28. Alfred's Books.**—Asser, a Welsh priest whom Alfred made Bishop of Exeter, was one of his great friends. He wrote a short Life of Alfred, which we still have. He tells us how Alfred always carried a little Hand-book about him, in which he had written down the Psalms and prayers in English, some of the poems he liked best, and many other things which he wished to remember; and

when he read or heard anything he liked, he would call Asser and beg him to write it in his book. We should be glad to have this Handbook, but it has long been lost. When Alfred became a good scholar he wished that those of his people who did not know Latin might have good books to read. He therefore put into English some of the best Latin books he knew, adding, as he wrote, such notes of his own as he thought would be useful. Among these were part of the Bible, a History of England, a Geography book, and a book on Wisdom and the comfort it brings to a man in trouble. He also had a History of his own time written in a book kept in the great church of Winchester, so that people that came after should know the truth about his reign. And he made one of his bishops English the book Pope Gregory wrote on the Duties of Clergymen, and sent a copy of it to every bishop in England, that they might teach their clergy out of it.

**29. Alfred's daily Work.**—Nor was this all. He built also two monasteries, or houses, one for nuns and the other for monks, and put pious men and women in them, to work and read and pray in peace. He set his friend John the Saxon over the one, and one of his

own daughters over the other. And this he did in memory of having been saved from Guthrum. He also found time to build halls and churches of stone and wood, and to make many useful tools and plans for doing work quicker and better than before. He rebuilt and restocked the farmhouses on his estates.



ALFRED ON HORSEBACK.

He set his smiths to make ornaments and jewels according to patterns he gave them. Some years ago the head of a sceptre beautifully worked in gold, with the words *Alfred ordered me to be made* on it, was found near Athelney. He was still fond of hunting and

training dogs and hawks. You will wonder how he found time for all these things, and it was only by husbanding his time that he could do so. As there were no watches or clocks in England in those days, people could only tell the time by the sun or stars; but these, by reason of darkness or clouds, were not always in sight, and Alfred bethought him of another way of measuring the time. He had candles made of wax, each twelve inches long, and in his own room or tent he kept one of them always burning in a lantern made of horn and wood. Now as six of these candles lasted just twenty-four hours, you can tell that it took twenty minutes to burn an inch, and see how the King was able to tell the time within a minute or two.

**30. Alfred's Management.**—When he was not at war Alfred always gave half his day to good works, prayer, learning, and teaching. In like manner half his money was laid out in alms to the poor, in keeping up the palace school and his two monasteries, and in gifts to the churches abroad in turn, as each needed it: he even sent alms as far as India, to the poor black Christians there. With the other part of his money he paid his guards and servants,

his workmen, and the guests who stayed with him. He divided his servants and guards into three companies, each of which passed a month on duty and two months at home in turn. His army he divided into halves, each of which in turn stayed at home to till the ground and reap the crops, while the other half guarded the land.

31. *Alfred's Children.*— Alfred's children were now grown up. His eldest son, Edward, who was king after him, had children of his own; one of them, Ethelstan, being a great pet of his grandfather, who gave him a purple cloak and a sword, and made him a soldier while he was yet a child. He was a pretty boy, with long fair hair and ruddy cheeks, and so good that Alfred said he would one day make a great king, as indeed it turned out. One of Alfred's daughters was, as you have heard, *abbess* or head nun of one of his abbeys; and another daughter was married to the Earl of Flanders, and through her Queen Victoria is descended from Alfred on one side. Alfred's eldest daughter, Ethelfled, was a famous woman, like her father in many ways. When Alfred and Guthrum made peace, it was agreed that Alfred should rule half the Midlands, and he gave his half in charge to one of

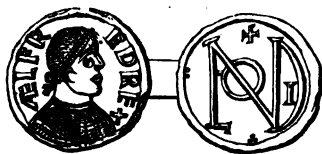
his nobles. Alfred built this noble a fort in London, where the Tower now stands, and gave him his eldest daughter Ethelfled to wife. After the death of her father and her husband Ethelfled ruled this part of England wisely and well, helping her brother Edward in his wars against the Danes and Welsh. She was called the Lady or Princess of London.

**32. Alfred's last Wars.**—For about twelve years those Danes and Northmen who had not settled down in England were away warring in France and Germany, and, but for a few sea fights against plundering pirate ships, England was left at peace. But in 893 Hasten, a Northern sea-king, landed in Kent with 250 ships full of men and horses, and built forts, and tried to conquer land to settle in. But Alfred overcame them in several battles, and when the Danes from Northumberland and East England gave them help, he beat them too. For three years hard fighting went on. Once when some Danish sea-rovers sailed up the Lea and built a fort at Ware, Alfred and the militia of London dug a great trench, and turned the water of the river into it, leaving their ships high and dry in the old bed of the

river. The Danes were obliged to take horses and ride away, leaving their ships in the power of the Londoners, who took some and sunk others. Not long ago one of these war galleys was found covered with mud deep in the ground near Ware. At last, finding King Alfred so good a soldier, and his fleet so well able to beat theirs, the Danes gave up all hope of winning land in England, and went away. The country had suffered a good deal from the war, and still more from a terrible plague that had raged at the same time, and killed off many of the best men in England. However, during the four years he was still to live, Alfred did all he could to repair these ills.

**33. Alfred's Death.**—In the year 901, six nights before Allhallowstide, he died, in the fifty-third year of his age and the thirtieth of his reign. His body was buried, first in the cathedral at Winchester, but afterwards in the Abbey of Hyde, close by, which he left money to build. But you cannot see his tomb, for in 1788 the ruins of this abbey were pulled down to make room for a jail, and the bones in the graveyard brutally dug up and thrown away. We do not know exactly

what Alfred was like in face or form. There are no pictures of him drawn in his own day, except the head on his coins, which you can see here in the cut. Of his good heart and



SILVER PENNY OF ALFRED, STRUCK AT LONDON

(On the one side is ALFRED REX, on the other the Monogram LONDON :).

wise head you have already heard, and those who write of him love to talk of his piety, his mercy, his courtesy, and kindly ways, and above all of his wonderful unselfishness. It would take long to tell of all the good he did, of the wise laws he made, the care with which he chose his bishops and aldermen, and all his never-ceasing work for his people. There never was a king or queen in England who did his or her duty so earnestly as he, although he had many pains and troubles to struggle against all the while. He says in one of his books, 'As long as I have lived, I have striven to live worthily,' and he hoped to leave after him 'the memory of good works.' And his worthy life and good works have indeed lived



in men's minds. He was long talked of as Alfred the Truth-teller, Alfred the Shepherd of England, Alfred the Darling of the English, and he ought ever to be held in loving remembrance by all of us who live in the land he loved so dearly and served so well.

## WILLIAM THE NORMAN.

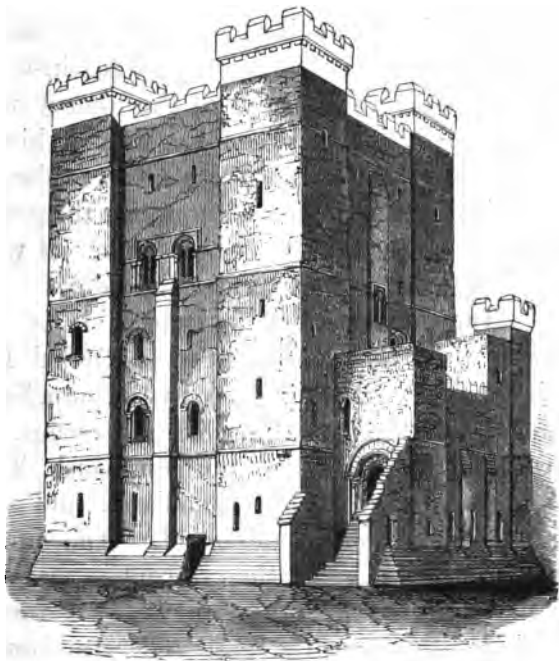
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1. How Rolf won Normandy.—In the days of Alfred and his brother Ethelred, while the Danes and Northmen were conquering and settling the north and east of England, armies of *wickings* also attacked France. Sailing up the Seine, and the other big rivers, these invaders would land, set up forts of earth-work and wood at well-chosen spots, and ravage all the country round. Then, laden with booty, they would take to their ships again, and sail off to some yet unwasted coast, which they would treat in the same way. They even beset and took walled towns, and once nearly stormed Paris itself. But the good Earl of Paris beat them off after many days' fighting. The grateful French chose this earl as their king, and his descendants ruled France for nine hundred years. But though he could hold his own earldom, he

could not drive the invaders out of the land or guard the coasts. So Rodwulf, or Rolf, as he is more often called, a great leader of the Northmen, finding that England was too well guarded by Alfred and his son Edward, made up his mind to settle down on the coast of France. Accordingly, he and his men seized the most fruitful piece of country along the whole French coast, and held it in spite of all the French kings could do. In the end one of the French kings was obliged to deal with Rolf as Alfred had done with Guthrum. In 911 he agreed that Rolf and his men should hold the land they had won, which was now called *Normandy*; that is, the Northman's, or Norman's land. And Rolf on his part promised to become a Christian, to live peacefully, and to help his overlord the French king against his enemies. Then Rolf was baptised, and the king was his godfather, and gave him his daughter as a wife.

**2. The Norman Settlers.**—The Normans settled down quietly, and their Duke Rolf parted the lands and villages among his men, who made the French peasants and farmers pay them the rent they had formerly paid to the French gentry whom the Normans had driven out. Very soon the new-comers gave

up their own tongue and spoke French instead. They also left off fighting on foot with target and axe, and took to fighting from horseback

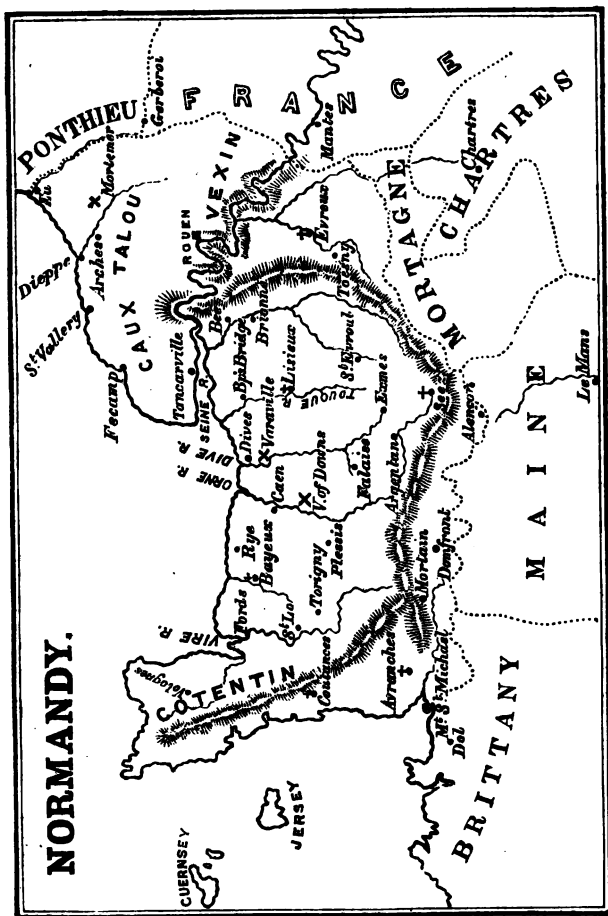


A NORMAN CASTLE IN ENGLAND.

with long lances and kite-shaped shields, like the French gentlemen. Like them, too, they soon began to build and live in *castles*, great square towers of stone, with small windows

and very thick walls, which could not be easily fired or broken down. For though they had become Christians, and paid great respect to clergymen, it was long before the Normans gave up their old habit of fighting each other when they had any cause of quarrel, instead of going to law. In spite of the almost unbroken friendship between the French kings and the Norman dukes, the castles were also of use against enemies from without, for the great nobles or *peers* of France were often at war with their new and powerful neighbours.

3. **The Norman Land.**—Indeed it is no wonder that the Normans were envied for their conquest. As you will see by the map, Normandy is shaped something like a crescent, or waxing moon, with its two horns upward. The left horn is a great hilly headland, and the right horn a rolling tableland. The inner curve and left edge of the crescent is marked by the sea, and the other curve by a range of hills. Between the east and west horns lies a rich broad plain, sloping gently back from the sea up towards the southern hills. This plain is watered by fine rivers, and dotted with fair woods and forests. It is a land of meadows and cornfields and orchards, like our own. If you were to see a Norman farm,



### MAP OF NORMANDY.

with its snug buildings, its well-tilled land, trim hedges, and full barns, and could watch the sturdy grey horses drawing the loaded wagons, and the beautiful cattle feeding in the lush grass, you would almost fancy yourself back in Kent or Cheshire again. And you might easily mistake the burly, red-cheeked, light-haired, blue-eyed Norman farmer and his well-grown sons and daughters for English folk. There is another point in which English and Normans are alike, and that is in their love for the sea. Along the sandy downs and under the cliffs of the Norman coast there are many little havens and fishing villages. The broad Seine, with all the little ports on its banks, as it runs down from Rouen to the sea, recalls our own English Thames. The bold Norman sailors, with their good merchant ships, soon began to do a great trade with England and other lands, and the west coast of France. For the Normans were fond of trade, and very keen at bargaining, their French neighbours said ; and in Rouen and the market towns, under the good rule of the dukes, they were able to buy and sell, and grow rich in peace.

**4. The Towns and Villages.**—Besides Rouen and the six bishops' towns, most of the towns

of Normandy were standing long before the Northmen came there; but many of the villages were first planted by the new-comers. In England, such names as *Grimsby* or *Kettlethorpe* point to their founders, Grim and Kettle, followers no doubt of Guthrum or Halfdan. So Rolf's sea-rovers have left their names in *Tancarville*, Thankred's village, and many other places. At first the Normans, who had never seen stone buildings in their own lands, preferred to timber their houses. But under the later dukes, besides building the huge towers we have talked of, they beautified their towns with fine stone churches, and halls, and hospitals, and raised fine stone houses and chapels for monks and nuns all over the country. Many of these are still standing to bear witness to their skill and taste.

**5. The Peasants' Rising, 997.**—The history of Normandy in early days is chiefly taken up with wars which, as they did little but make folks wretched, we may pass over. But there are some things that must be told. In the days of Duke Richard, Rolf's great-grandchild, the small farmers and peasants began to take counsel together secretly about the way their lords treated them. Said they, 'We toil hard, and get little gain by it, for we have to



pay heavy rents. Under pretence of dues and taxes, our cattle and horses are taken from us by the lord's officers. They work the law against us too, so that, what with their beadles and bailiffs, we never have a quiet hour; for they drag us to court and fine us heavily without cause. We cannot even bake or brew or grind our corn without heavy tolls. Moreover they daily abuse and look down on us as slaves. Why should we bear all this? Let us shake off their yoke and be our own masters. We are men as they are, as strong and big, we only lack courage. Let us bind ourselves by oath to hold together one and all, and stand up for ourselves and our earnings. If they come against us with arms, there are thirty or forty sturdy fellows of us to every one of them. We must be cowards if we cannot defend ourselves with our clubs, and forks, and axes, and bills, or even stones, against their swords and spears. We have no castles, but we can take to the woods, and live on the deer and fish, and build strongholds of tree-trunks.' So they chose the cleverest and best speakers among them to go round the villages and bind the peasants together by oath. But their plan soon leaked out, and the duke sent his uncle with an army of knights against

them. He fell upon the peasants suddenly, while they were meeting to talk over the matter, and put them to flight. The ring-leaders he took, and punished so cruelly, that the rest were frightened. So their whole plan, you will be sorry to hear, came to nothing.

**6. The Birth of William the Conqueror, 1027.**—When Duke Richard, of whom we talked before, died, his elder son and namesake was chosen duke. He had a brother Robert, a gallant young knight. One day, while Robert was staying at Falaise, a pretty town in his earldom, he saw a beautiful girl among the women who were washing their clothes in the river that ran by the castle. He asked who she was, and was told that she was the daughter of a tanner in the town. He spoke to her, and, finding that she was as clever as she was fair, fell in love with her, and took her to his castle. There, in June 1027, she bore him a son, William, who became a famous man, as you will see from his life. It is told that when the boy was born the old nurse laid him down on a bed of straw. The baby put out his little hands and clutched at it, so that when she came to take him up he had grasped as much straw as he could hold in his arms. ‘You will be a great

lord some day,' said she, 'and win lands and riches, since you begin to take hold of things so early.' Robert was fond of the boy, and had him well brought up.

**7. Duke Robert's Death.**—About a year after William was born, his uncle the duke died, and his father Robert became duke in his place. He ruled well and happily for seven years, when he made up his mind to go as a pilgrim to Jerusalem, to pray at the tomb of the Lord. He called all his great men to him, and told them of his wish. They made answer with one accord, 'If you go, sir, we shall be badly off; the land will be without a ruler. And if anything should befall you, those of your kinsmen, who think they ought to be ruling here, will quarrel over the dukedom, and our land will be torn in two.' 'My lords,' said Robert, 'you are right. I have only one son, whom, if you and the King of France please, I will give you as my heir. He is little now, but he will grow. He is of your own blood, and if you love him faithfully, you will do well. I will leave him with you in my place.' 'We will serve him with a good will,' answered they. Then they went up one by one to the little fellow, who was now eight years old, and, putting their hands

in his, swore to be faithful to him, and take him as their lord if his father died. Then Robert started on his journey, well pleased, having left the care of his child to the most trusty of his friends. He went through his pilgrimage, but died on his way home in the same year, 1031.

8. *William's Childhood.*—Great and long was the mourning for the Duke Robert, and deep the sorrow of his little son. His guardians stood by him truly, and the King of France, whom his father had befriended, was glad that he should be Duke. But he had many *vassals*, knights and gentlemen, who held land of him on condition of serving him in peace and war, and among these he had few friends. Many of those whom his father had held dear carried themselves proudly and haughtily towards him because of his birth, and set no store by his wishes. The great lords made war upon each other, burning and attacking the towns, robbing the peasants of their flocks and herds and corn, and doing all manner of wickedness. William was not yet old or powerful enough to compel them to obey him, though it grieved him to see and hear of such evil doings. The Norman lords also, without their Duke's leave, began to build castles

wherein they could defend themselves against their neighbours, and store their plunder safely. By reason of these castles disputes and quarrels arose, and things were worse than before. It is indeed a wonder that the boy's life was not taken by some of the wicked men who plotted against him. One after another of his guardians was murdered, and he was only saved by the watchful care of Walter, his mother's brother. More than once Walter was obliged to hide him away for a time in poor men's cottages from his enemies; for the poor loved him, and hoped that when he grew up he would rule well and put down evil-doing. He grew up tall and strong, skilled in all kinds of bodily feats, a fine rider and a good archer. His troubled life had made him ready in danger, sober and self-controlled, and shrewd and thoughtful beyond his years. It was not an easy task to rule the Normans. As he himself said, they were like a team of well-bred and high-spirited young horses, that will go far and well when the reins of order are held by a strong man, but if they are left to themselves will rush wildly on till they and their foolish driver are overthrown in misery, shame, and destruction.

9. **A Plot against William.**—When William was about twenty years old, and had begun to rule by himself, there was a dangerous rebellion in Normandy against him. His cousin Guy, who had been his playmate and friend, and had received lands and castles from him, began to be puffed up with pride, and to say that he ought to be duke instead of William. As he was a crafty fellow, he managed to talk over some of the great lords in the west of Normandy. For he promised to let them rule their lands as they liked if they would choose him as duke and help him to overthrow William. They agreed, and began secretly to make ready to rebel. The Duke, knowing nothing of their plot, was at this time staying at a little town in West Normandy with a few followers, passing the time in hunting in the woods—for, like Alfred, he loved sport. One night, when all the household had gone to bed, just as William was in his first sleep, there came to the door of his room a man with a great staff, shouting, ‘Let me in! Let me in! You are a dead man if you stay here. Get up! Get up! Where are you, William? Your foes are coming here to seek you: if they find you, you will never leave this spot, nor see the sun again!’ And all the while he

beat and hammered at the door with his staff, to rouse the sleepers. It was Wallet, *the fool*, who had come to warn his master. In those days, you must know, kings and princes used to keep a clown, or funny man, to amuse them. He used to wear a high cap and bells, and bright parti-coloured clothes, and was called the *fool*, though he was often a clever man.

10. *William's Escape.*—William sprang up, seized his sword, threw a cloak over his night-clothes, and was soon on horseback, riding for his life through the moonlit night. Past fields and orchards and pastures he rode, and at dawn he reached the Fords. The tide was low, and he was able to cross. He dared not ride through Bayeux to his own town Falaise, for fear of his enemies, so he kept on between it and the sea, and as the sun rose he reached a hamlet. Hubert, the lord of that place, was standing at the gate between his house and the church, looking down the road, when he spied a half-clothed rider, wet and travel-stained, coming along on a lagging horse. He was astonished to find that it was the Duke himself. 'What is the matter, my lord?' he cried. 'Why are you riding in this plight?' 'I do not know whether I dare tell you,

Hubert.' 'You can trust me, my lord, and speak out boldly.' 'Well, then, my enemies have sworn to take my life, and they are hunting after me, to slay me.' Hubert begged William to stay at his house, while he got him a morsel of bread and a cup of wine, and had his best steed saddled for him, since his own was nearly foundered. Then he called to his sons, 'To horse, my lads! You must guide your lord to Falaise by the cross-paths off the high roads.' They only waited for their father to tell them the way, and then galloped off with the Duke. Hubert went to the gate to bid them God-speed, and stood there wondering what would happen. Hardly were his sons and the Duke out of sight when the pursuers came spurring up the road. They drew rein, to ask Hubert if he had seen William, and which way he had gone. 'This way,' said he, pointing down the south road: 'he is not long past, you will soon overtake him. But if you will wait till I get a horse I will guide you myself.' They were glad of this; but the good knight took care to lead them by paths that would never bring them on William's track, and at last they turned back empty-handed. That night the Duke was safe in his good town of Falaise. The



people, who did not like Guy, were glad to hear of his safety, and cursed the wicked man who had planned this treachery.

**11. The Battle of the Valley of the Downs.**—William, knowing that his foemen were gathering troops, went off to the King of France to beg his help, and Henry gathered his host and marched into Normandy to help him. William and his faithful men of East Normandy joined him at the Valley of the Downs, where his foes made ready to attack them. As Henry and William rode down their lines, staff in hand, putting their men in array, the king saw a body of six-score knights, well armed and horsed, standing apart from either army. Said he, ‘Whichever side those knights take, must win. Who is their leader?’ ‘Ralf,’ answered William; ‘and I think he will hold with me, for I have never wronged him.’ Now the rebels had made Ralf swear that he would strike a blow at William the first time he saw him, for they misdoubted his staying by them. But his own men said, ‘You cannot surely fight against the Duke. You know the saying—

He that against his lord shall stand,  
Will surely lose good name and land.’

‘You are right,’ said Ralf. ‘I hold my lands of

him, and have vowed to be ever true to him.' So he rode off alone to where the Duke was, struck him twice lightly with his glove to fulfil his oath, and then told him that he would serve him in the battle. The field was a fine sight. There were the war-banners of the several lords and knights gaily painted in red and blue and gold, with their badges and arms. Beneath them were lines of glittering lance-tips, shining shields, and helmets. The fine horses were plunging and prancing, and the faces of their riders were cheery and brave. The king was on the left hand with the French, and William, with his knights and foot soldiers, on the right.

**12. The King and William win the Day.**—With great shouts from either side the fight began. The King of France himself led his men on, and showed himself a gallant soldier. In the midst of the fray he was unhorsed by a knight, and later in the fight a rebel lord rode suddenly at him and struck him down, hoping to slay him and so win the day. But a French knight killed him on the spot and rescued Henry, who rode into the battle again. Meanwhile, William having slain a strong knight with his lance, put one of the rebel leaders in such fear, that he threw away his

spear and shield and fled cowering, as hard as his horse could carry him. A gallant charge of Ralf drove the other rebels back, but while the rest fled the chief of the rebels fought on like a brave man. If all his men had behaved like him the French and William



A NORMAN KNIGHT OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

would never have won the day. At last, seeing that nearly all his friends were fallen or fled, and that his enemies were growing thicker, he, too, was obliged to leave the field. The run-

ways were hotly pursued, and so many were killed or drowned at the fords of the river in their flight, that the mill-wheels were choked by their bodies. This was the first great battle William fought. It gave him peace at home for a while, for though Guy held out some time in his strong castles, he was taken at last. All the other rebels came and begged for pardon, and William forgave them all save the man that tried to kill him by night, who died in prison.

**13. William helps Henry against Earl Geoffrey.**—However, like Alfred, William was to be in arms nearly all his life. It was not long before King Henry, to whom he owed so much, asked his help in a war against Earl Geoffrey, a powerful peer who had won some famous victories. The Duke eagerly gathered a fine army and joined the king. In this war he did many brave deeds, and put himself in such danger that Henry begged him to be more careful of his life. One day, as he was out with a few men seeking forage for the camp, about three hundred knights set upon him. Instead of flying, William charged them, and fought so fiercely that they turned and fled, leaving a prisoner in his hands. He was now fast becoming famous for his skill as

a leader, and the quick eye with which he picked out the weak spot in his enemies' plans. His strict justice brought him the love of the poor, but there were many people who, having profited by evil-doing, were loath to live well. Among these were the townsmen of a strong border city. Accordingly they took the side of Geoffrey against their own Duke. William soon beset them; but they trusted in the thickness of their walls and the deep ditch round them, and the rock on which they stood, and laughed at his order to surrender. To show their scorn still more they hung hides over the wall before his face, and beat them, crying, 'Hides for the tanner! Stick to thy rightful trade, tanner!' in mockery of his mother's lowly birth. This made the Duke so angry that he swore to lop them like willows when he took the town. Then he called up his men, and bade them bring wood and straw and fill the ditch. They tore down the houses outside the town, and piled the beams and laths and straw in the ditch high against the wall. To this heap they set fire, and the stuff being dry and the wind blowing hard, the flame soon caught the wooden battlements, and drove the townsmen from their posts. Now William's men set

ladders to the walls, and scaled them before the fire was quenched, and so gained the town. And the Duke punished those who had mocked him, according to his oath. Skilled warrior as he was, Geoffrey dare not face William, and was glad to make peace with the King of France, and trust to the future to win back the towns he had lost to the Norman Duke.

**14. William's Visit to his Cousin Edward of England.**—Edward, King of England, the son of William's great-aunt, had been brought up in Normandy, and had lived there nearly all the time that Canute and his sons had ruled over the English. He had never forgotten the kindness the Normans had shown to him and his father when they were driven from their own land. He liked the polished Norman manners and behaviour better than the rough and homely ways of the English. He found, too, that many of the English clergy were not so well-read or hard-working as those of Normandy. Being a pious man, and eager for the Church's good, he brought over several Norman priests and monks, and gave them bishoprics and livings in England, that they might teach the English and shame them out of their lazy ways. One of these, Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury, was in high favour with

him. Unluckily, Robert hated the king's minister, Godwin, Earl of the West Saxons. The earl was a wise and powerful man, a good speaker and councillor, and greatly loved by the English. He had talked them into choosing Edward for king, and Edward, who was at first very grateful to him, had married his daughter Edith. However, a quarrel arose between the men of Dover and one of Edward's foreign kinsmen, in which Godwin rightly took the townsmen's part. Robert then prevailed on the king to send the queen to a nunnery and outlaw his faithful minister and all his sons. While they were all in banishment, Edward sent to his cousin William, to beg him to come to England and see him, for he heard much talk of his great deeds and good government. William accordingly went to England with a great train. The king welcomed him warmly, and took him about his kingdom, showing him his riches and power. He gave him many goodly gifts, too, jewels and raiment, and hawks and hounds. No doubt Archbishop Robert was pleased to see them so friendly, and he may have advised Edward, who was now old and childless and had no heir in England, to promise William, whom he saw to be a wise and worthy ruler,

that he would do his best to get him chosen king after him. This promise of Edward's was by no means forgotten by the Duke.

15. **The Ambush of Arches.**—Duke William had an uncle of the same name as himself, to whom he gave the town of Arques or Arches and the lordship of the land round it. The only use this foolish and treacherous man made of his kinsman's bounty was to defy his commands, build a castle at Arches, and plunder the poor farmers and villagers of the land round it. The Duke had Arches Castle blockaded, hoping to starve his uncle out, without bloodshed. But the traitor wrote to the King of France, offering to become his servant if he would beat off the Duke. King Henry sent an army to his help, for he had grown jealous of the Duke's power, and would have liked to rule in Arches. The Duke hurried across Normandy to defend his land, but before he came up the Normans laid an ambush for the French near *Arches*. Into this they fell and their leader was killed, all his soldiers being put to flight. The Normans also took the pack-horses laden with corn and wine, which were sent for the relief of Arches Castle, where the food was now running low. William of Arches, finding all help



thus cut off, gave up his castle and went into banishment.

**16. William's Marriage.**—After these deeds William's barons, fearing lest in some war their Duke might be slain and the land left without a ruler, begged him to marry. Many princes were willing to give him their daughters to wife. He chose Matilda, sister of the Earl of Flanders, a fair and noble lady, who was descended from King Alfred. They were married in 1053, amid great rejoicings. However, the Duke's uncle the Archbishop of Rouen, brother of William of Arches, and many of the Norman clergy, were angry at the marriage, holding that it was against a certain rule of the Church. A learned Churchman, named Lanfranc, also spoke against it. William, however, took his uncle's archbishopric away, and banished Lanfranc. This Lanfranc was an Italian, who had been brought up as a lawyer, but had given up his profession and came to Normandy as a teacher, for he knew that the Normans welcomed those who could teach them well. After teaching a short while he grew tired of the world, and became a monk at a little abbey. Here he lived, praying and reading and writing. The monks soon found him to be a man of great wisdom, meekness,

and piety, and made him *prior* or under-governor of their abbey.

**17. Lanfranc the Monk.**—When Lanfranc was banished they were sorely troubled, and bade him God-speed heartily, as he rode sadly away on a sorry old horse, which was the only beast they could lend him, for they were poor, and had to work hard to get enough food to eat. As Lanfranc rode slowly through the woods, he met a party of huntsmen with their hounds. At their head was the Duke himself. When he saw the prior he knew him, and cried, 'What, Lanfranc, why have you not yet left Normandy?' 'If I had had a better horse, sir,' said Lanfranc, looking down at his poor lame nag, 'I should have been away already.' The Duke laughed at his words, and told him to turn round and ride with him a little. When they came to talk, and he saw how clever and good-tempered Lanfranc was, he took him into his favour and made him his friend. Soon he asked his advice as to how he was to please the Church about his marriage, since he did not wish to break the Church laws, and he would not leave his wife, for he loved her dearly. Lanfranc said that he had better ask the pope to settle it, so the Duke sent him to Rome to talk it over with

the pope. The pope had heard of Lanfranc's wisdom, and listened to him graciously. After a while he sent him home with a message to the Duke that the marriage should hold good, but that, as the Duke had married without the leave of the Church, he must set aside a part of his riches for the good of the poor and the Church. The Duke readily agreed to do so, and he and his wife each built a beautiful monastery at Caen. Matilda's was called Holy Trinity, and was for nuns; the Duke's, called S. Stephen's, was for monks. The churches of these abbeys are still standing, and are most fair and stately buildings, worthy of their founders. The Duke also built four hospitals in Normandy, and gave lands, the rents of which should go to keep them up.

**18. A Norman Monastery.**—A Norman monastery in those days was a busy and hard-working place. The monks were most of them people who wished to worship God and serve their fellow men in peace. Their lives were hard and toilsome. They built the large stone houses in which they all lived together, and the church in which they worshipped. They worked in the fields for their daily bread, made their own rough clothes, and dressed their frugal meals themselves. They set aside

part of each day for reading and writing, taught in their schools the sons of the nobles, and took care of the poor and sick of their neighbourhood. There was a library in every monastery, and most of the books in it were written by their own hands. One of the brethren kept a book, in which he entered such notable things as happened from year to year. It is from these *Chronicles* and the old Latin and Greek books copied and taken care of by the monks that we learn nearly all we know of the history of old days, and the wisdom of wise men who lived long ago.

A monastery was usually built in some place where there was a river, in which the monks could fish, for they were not allowed to eat meat often, and near a wood where they could get fuel. The buildings were often set round a court, which had a covered passage running round it called a *cloister*, in which the brothers could work in bad weather. There was a church, a dining-hall, a meeting-room (where they met to settle the business of the monastery), a large sleeping-room, and a number of little *cells* or cabins; each monk had one of these, in which he lived when he was not working out of doors. The monks wore rough coats of wool with hoods,

and sandals or shoes. They were obliged to obey their *abbot* (or ruler) and their *prior*, and were severely punished if they broke any rule of the monastery. Few men, unless they were earnest and hard-working, or trying to atone for their sins by doing what good they could before they died, would care to live such lives as these old Norman monks did. Of course there were bad men as well as good in the monasteries, and we hear many sad stories of their misdeeds. Still we may be sure that wise men like the Duke would not have favoured monks if they were not most of them of some use to their fellow men in his day.

**19. The Duke's Family.**—The Duke and Matilda had four sons and five daughters. Of some of them you will hear in the course of the story. The Duke had two half-brothers, Odo and Robert, for his mother had married after his father's death. William was kind to all his kinsmen, and he did not forget his brothers. He made Odo, who was brought up a clergyman, Bishop of Bayeux. But Odo was violent, selfish, and grasping, and did not make a good bishop or act wisely, which in the end brought him into sad distress. Robert was made an Earl; he was a brave soldier,

and wise enough to be content with his lot. All his life the Duke had much trouble brought on him by his nearest of kin. We shall now see how the treason of his uncle William put his land and himself in great jeopardy again, within a year of his marriage.

**20. The Surprise of Mortimer, 1054.**—King Henry could not forget the defeat of his men at Arches, and listened willingly to the evil counsels of one of his earls, who wished to avenge his brother's death at the ambush of Arches, and to the crafty words of Duke William's old enemy, Geoffrey. They said, 'Sir, these Normans are nothing but a set of beer-drinking sea-robbers, who stole part of France from your forefathers. Why not drive them out? You are well able to do it!' So Henry sent a number of his knights to march northward, and do all the harm they could, while he himself, with the bulk of his forces, fought against the Duke who was then lying in camp in the West. The Normans let the French knights get well into the country before they showed fight, so that the Frenchmen began to think that all the Norman soldiers must be across the Seine with the Duke. So they took up their quarters at Mortimer, and amused themselves by laying waste the country

by day, and feasting over their plunder at night. But early in the morning, when all the French were asleep, the Norman knights beset the town, and set fire to it. When the half-armed Frenchmen rushed out of the houses they found Norman soldiers guarding every way out of the town. Very few managed to cut their way through and escape. The dreadful fight went on from daybreak till the afternoon, in the midst of the smoke and roaring of the flames, the shouts of the struggling soldiers, the cries of the burnt and wounded, and the shrieks of the frightened horses that had broken from their blazing stables, and were dashing riderless about the streets. At last the flames slackened and the bloodshed ceased, for the town was in ashes and every Frenchman was dead or taken. There was hardly a Norman soldier but had won a horse or a coat of mail, and every Norman baron had taken as many prisoners as he could guard. The joyful news of his foes' defeat was sent by speedy messenger to the Duke the same day. He at once bade his standard-bearer to take the tidings to the King of France. The Norman knight reached the French camp at night, and, getting in unseen, climbed to the top of a tall

tree, and, when all was quiet, shouted in a loud voice—

Frenchmen all! 'Tis time to wake!  
 You've work to do; you've graves to make  
 For all your friends that graveless lie,  
 Slain by your Norman enemy.  
 Haste! Haste away! nor linger here!  
 Your friends lie dead at Mortimer.

The king and his men woke at this cry, and when they found that his tidings were true they made haste to be gone out of Normandy. The Duke would not pursue them, saying, 'The king has suffered enough, I will not vex him more,' and sent the prisoners home to France.

21. *The Rout at Varaville.*—However, in spite of this dreadful warning Henry made up his mind to have his revenge. So in the autumn of 1058, he marched through Normandy, as far as Caen, doing great damage to the farmers, for it was nigh upon harvest time and the corn was yet in the field. The Duke would not give them battle till he saw that he could make sure of defeating them, but at last his time came. The whole French army, with a long string of horses and wagons laden with Norman booty, was filing along the narrow causeway that runs across the flats of Varaville



to the fords of Dive. As soon as the king and his knights had passed the river with the van of the army, William suddenly set upon the rear-guard and baggage-train. The long straggling line was thrown into confusion. The ford was soon choked by a mass of struggling men and horses, who could not get across themselves, and hindered those behind. The tide, too, was rising fast, and in a short time the ford would be impassable. Those behind knew this, and pressed forward madly. In their wild fright hundreds of soldiers were thrust into the swollen stream, and borne away by the current. The Norman peasants from all the country round hurried up with clubs and hayforks to punish the Frenchmen who had spoiled their harvest, and they killed the few that stream and sword had spared. King Henry wept with rage and sorrow at the painful sight, and would have dashed into the river to try and swim across to help his men. But his knights stayed him. 'You have lost enough to-day, sir,' said they, 'why risk your life?' This was the last time King Henry bore arms. In 1060 he died, about the same time as Geoffrey, William's old enemy. The new King of France, Henry's son, was only seven years old when he began to reign.

**22. William gains Maine.**—William was now the most powerful prince that had ever ruled Normandy. The Bretons obeyed him as overlord, his most deadly enemies were dead, and his nobles had learnt that they must be faithful to him or undergo heavy punishment. But, mighty though he was, he could not stop them from quarrelling and making war on each other. By advice of the clergy, however, he called a meeting at Caen, in 1061, and made all present swear to keep the *Truce of God*. By this oath everyone was bound to keep the peace towards all men between the sunset of Wednesday and the sunrise of Monday. So that for part of every week, at least, the land was at perfect peace. The people were glad of this *Truce*, and built a fine church of stone on the spot where the oath was sworn, which they called the Church of Holy Peace. In 1062 the Earl of Maine died, and left his earldom to William. Thus William became Lord of Maine, a rich earldom, half as big as Normandy, a land of hills and woods and little farms. The people of Maine were glad to get a ruler who could uphold justice and put down evil-doing, and welcomed him to their chief town. But some of the nobles who were afraid of his strong hand resisted

him. However, after he had taken Mayenne, they, too, gave in, and took him as their lord. Mayenne was such a strong place that it was thought that no one could take it. The Duke found that all his *war-engines* were in vain. These were great catapults and slings, worked by many men, which threw huge stone bullets, and beams of wood to batter the walls of a castle, for there were no cannon in those days. Nor could the archers drive the garrison from the high walls built on a steep rock. So William did as he had done once before—threw fire into the place from his engines, and very soon forced the soldiers inside to yield it to him.

23. *Harold's Oath to William.*—In 1064 William had a famous Englishman as his guest of whom you will hear more further on in our story. You remember how Earl Godwin, the English King Edward's minister, was banished. After two years he came back in 1052, and the English nobles led the king to take him back into favour. The Norman favourites fled out of England, and a new archbishop, an Englishman, and a friend of Godwin's, was set in Robert's place. However, Godwin did not live long to enjoy his power. When he died the king set his eldest son, Harold, in his

father's place. Harold was a tall, handsome man, of great bodily strength and skill, a wise ruler and a skilful general, and much beloved by the West Saxons. It happened that Edward wanted some one to go to Normandy on an errand for him. Harold, who had been abroad before, offered to go. But the king said, 'You had better let some one else go ; it is not wise for you to put yourself in William's power.' Harold would not take advice, and set off to Normandy. On the passage a storm arose and drove them upon the coast of France. When the earl of the place heard that Harold, earl of the West Saxons, had been wrecked in his land, he seized him and put him in prison, hoping to get a great ransom for him from King Edward. But Harold was able to send one of his Englishmen to Duke William to tell him of his evil plight. William threatened the cruel earl with his anger unless he let the Englishman go. So Harold was soon set free. The Duke welcomed Harold blithely, gave him horses and arms, and promised to give him one of his daughters to wife. The two friends went hunting together, and when William made war upon the Bretons who had rebelled against him, he took Harold with

him. Here the English earl showed his wonderful strength by pulling on to firm ground some knights who had sunk in a quicksand. But for him they must have perished there. Before Harold went home, the Duke asked him to swear that he would be faithful to him, that he would one day marry his daughter, and that he would do his best to get him the English crown when Edward died. Harold did not like this, and remembered Edward's warning ; but it was too late, he was in the Duke's power. So with shaking voice and trembling hand he took the oath on a sacred casket laid on the top of a chest covered with a cloth. When he had sworn, William uncovered the chest and showed him that it was full of the bones of the Norman saints, telling him that those saints would surely take vengeance on him if he broke his oath. So Harold saw the Duke mistrusted him, since he had made him take a more solemn promise than he had thought to have taken. But he dared not show his anger, and they parted in all friendliness.

24. How Harold was made King.—At Christmastide, 1065, King Edward of England fell so ill that it was easy to see he could not live long. For some time he lay senseless ;

but before he died his wits and speech came back to him, and he spoke to Earl Harold, his brother-in-law, and the other nobles who were watching at his bedside, of evils to come shortly upon England. They begged him to name the man he wished to be king after him. Said Edward, 'I should have liked my cousin William to be king, and I think some of you have bound yourselves to him.' They answered, 'Sir, if we have any king but Harold, we shall have no peace.' 'Then choose whom you will,' said the dying man, and turning to Harold he prayed him to take care of his sister the queen, who stood by weeping; and of all his old friends. He warned him, too, that if he took the crown his life would soon be cut short. He could say no more, for he was sinking fast, and died the same day, January 5th, 1066. The English wept over him and buried him in the beautiful Abbey Church which he had built at Westminster, where you may see his tomb to this day. He was a pious, kindly, simple man, and England was happy while he was king. The English nobles now met and agreed to offer the crown to Harold, for they did not want a foreigner for king, and the only English kinsman Edward had left was a boy too young to rule. Harold took

the crown, and was hallowed king the day after his brother-in-law's death. Whether he broke his oath for the sake of the English people or for the sake of the crown, we shall never know, but it is certain that no man but he whom the English people chose could have the slightest right to be king in England. So that, though William had a right to be angry with Harold, he had no right to claim the crown of England, which no oath of Edward's or Harold's could give him, but only the wish of the English people.

**25. William claims the English Crown.—**

A few days after Harold's crowning, the Duke was going out hunting. He had just bent his bow and handed it to his page, and was looking forward to a good day's sport. Suddenly a messenger, fresh from England, came up to him, drew him aside, and told him that his cousin was dead and Harold king in his stead. William left his sport without a word and turned back to his palace, tying and untying his mantle strings as he went. When he came to his hall he sat down at the end of a bench, covered his head with his mantle, and leant against a pillar. There he stayed silently brooding over the news. No one dared speak to him or ask him what ailed him,

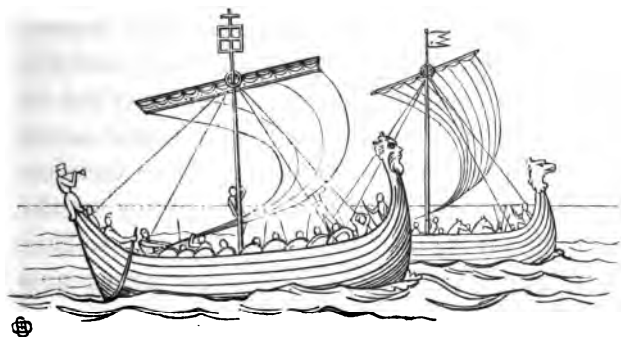
till his minister, William FitzOsbern, went up to him boldly and said, 'Sir, do not sorrow any more over what is past, but think how you may best gather an army to cross the sea and win from Harold the kingdom your cousin wished you to have.' William first sent to Harold to ask him to keep his oath. But Harold answered, 'I swore the oath for fear of death or prison; and now that the English have chosen me king, I cannot give up the crown, nor can I marry a foreign wife against their wish.' Then William called a meeting of his vassals and told them plainly that Harold had wronged him, and that if they would help him he was minded to cross the sea and get his rights by force. They hung back for a while, for they knew that Harold was a brave man and had good soldiers, and they feared the perils of the sea. But the Duke talked them over one by one, promising to reward them freely for their help. William, also, got many soldiers from other lands, for he caused it to be made known that if any man would join his army, he would pay him well. But his brother-in-law, the Earl of Flanders, would not help him; and when he offered the King of France to hold England of him as he held Normandy, if he would aid



him, the king refused. For his counsellors told him, 'If William wins England he will be too strong for you, so that you ought to try and hinder his enterprise.' William was angry at the king's refusal, and said, 'Whether you help me or no, sir, I shall go and seek my rights. If I win them, I shall not care for your friendship, and if I fail, I will take care your ill-will does me no harm.' But from the pope, to whom he had written to complain of Harold's breach of oath and to ask a blessing on his arms, he got a hallowed banner and a precious ring, and the blessing he had asked. For the pope only knew one side of the story, and thought William altogether in the right.

**26. William lands in England.**—For six months or more there was a mighty stir all over Normandy. At every port shipwrights and carpenters and engineers were hard at work building and rigging ships and boats to carry the Duke's army. Every smith in the country had enough to do forging spear-heads and sword-blades, and fashioning helmets and shields. The roads were full of men and carts and pack-horses taking stores and corn and wine and arms to the camp at the mouth of the River Dive. When all was ready, the Duke, after waiting some time weather-bound on the coast, set

sail for England. There were 700 ships save four, besides a number of small craft carrying stores for the bigger vessels. On board them were about 60,000 men. The Duke's ship, the most beautiful and best vessel in the fleet, a gift from his wife, was called the 'Mora.' It had a carved figure-head; at the stern was a figure of a boy, finely wrought



THE 'MORA,' DUKE WILLIAM'S SHIP.

in brass, with a lance in his hand and a horn to his mouth. At the topmast was a huge lantern, so that the other ships could follow it by night; the sails were dyed red and white. The captain's name was Stephen. After a quick voyage the fleet reached the Sussex coast safely on Michaelmas Eve. The Duke was the first to spring ashore. As he

touched the land his feet slipped, and he saved himself with his hands. 'A bad sign,' cried his men. But William sprang up and called out, 'Gentlemen, you see that I have seized England with my hands, I warrant you I will hold it against all my foes.' So his men were cheered again. Then the nimble, short-coated archers landed with their bows strung and their quivers full of arrows, and stood ready to drive off any enemy. Next the horses, saddles, and shields were put ashore, and the knights in their helmets and mail-coats got on horseback and went forward in battle array to guard the landing-place. The helpless English villagers fled and took shelter in the churches and churchyards, not daring to face such a mighty host. The ships being now beached high and dry, the workmen and carpenters with their axes and adzes set to work to put up a large wooden fort which they had brought over in pieces. Ere night fell, camp and ships were safely fenced round. Fires were then lit, and ovens made, food was cooked, bread baked, and wine-casks broached. Every man made a hearty meal, and was glad to be on land again.

**27. Harold makes ready for Battle.**—The reason that the landing was not resisted was

that Harold and his army were away in Yorkshire. They had gone there to fight the King of Norway, who had landed with a mighty host to try and conquer England. But he was overthrown and slain at *Stamford Bridge*. It was while King Harold was feasting at York after this victory that the news of William's landing reached him. He hastened forthwith to London, bidding the Earls of Northumberland and the Midlands follow him as soon as they could. William sent to him at London to bid him yield the crown at once, and Harold sent back to offer the Duke as much money as he liked if he would go away, but he would not. Then Harold's brother, Gurth, Earl of the East English, said, 'My brother, I have not sworn any oath to William. Let me go and fight him, while you gather another army and burn all the villages and towns behind me, and drive off all the cattle and carry off the corn. So that if I am beaten, the Duke will not be able to get on for lack of food.' Harold answered, 'How can I harm the people I have promised to rule? Moreover, I will never have it said of me that I sent my brother where I was afraid to go myself.' So he marched out to fight William, and set up his standard on the hill of Senlake,

a few miles from Hastings, where the Duke then lay. Though his men pressed William to give battle at once, before the northern earls could join Harold, the Duke still hoped to avoid bloodshed, and sent again to the English king. This time he offered him to let the pope judge between them, or to meet him man to man and fight for the crown. And when Harold said no to this, William offered to make him Earl of Northumberland and let his brothers keep their earldoms if he would only give up the crown. But Gurth led his brother to refuse this also, though others of the English thought the offer fair. So it was settled there should be a battle on the next Saturday, October 14, at Senlake. The English passed the Friday night singing and feasting round their camp fires, but the Normans in watching and prayer. Early on the morrow the Duke roused his men, and taking his stand on a hillock, spoke to them all. 'I cannot thank you as I would for coming here to fight in my quarrel, but if I win to-day, and with such a fine army we cannot be beaten, you shall share my gains.' Then there was a great shout, 'We are all ready to die for you if need be.' 'Well, then,' said he, 'strike and spare not! Do

not stop to take spoil; we will parcel that out fairly afterwards. Do not think of flight, for you have nowhere to fly to, and the English will not show you any mercy.' Then he called for his Spanish war-horse, mounted, and led the army to Senlake. When they came up to the hill where the English lay, William drew up his knights in three bodies. On the left were the Bretons and men of Maine under the Earl of Brittany; on the right were the hired soldiers under William FitzOsbern, and in the midst were the Normans, commanded by the Duke and his two brothers. For Odo, though a priest, put on a mail coat, took a great club in hand, and fought all day in the thickest of the fight. Before the Norman army was a long line of archers. In front of the English host, on the brow of the hill, Harold had made a stout barricade of wooden stakes strongly bound together, with a ditch in front of it. Behind this his men were drawn up. The guards and men of London, whose post was always next the king, were in the middle by the royal standard. On the left were the men of Kent, whose place was always in the front of the battle. On the right and behind were bands of countrymen armed with bills and

clubs and slings. The English gentlemen and militia wore mail-coats and helmets, and were armed with broadswords, javelins, and huge two-handed Danish axes. There were no archers among them, and they all fought on foot after the old fashion. Harold, with his brothers Gurth and Leofwin, rode through his army bidding his men keep their ranks and stand shoulder to shoulder. 'For,' said he, 'if you break your line the Norman knights will overcome you ; but if you stand steady we must win the day.' Then he dismounted and took his place by his standard.

28. Battle of Hastings, October 14, 1066. —A Norman minstrel named Tailefer, *Iron-hewer*, was the first to strike a blow. He rode forward singing a song about Charles the Great and his knights, tossing his spear up in the air the while and catching it again, till he came to the English lines. There he slew two men before he was killed. Now the battle began. The Norman archers shouted 'Dex aie !' God help us ! and charged up to the barricade. But the English cheered lustily and drove them back with cries of 'Out ! Out !' 'Holy Cross !' From nine till three the battle raged, with the clash of lances, the clatter of axe-strokes, the ring of sword-

blows and the whistling of arrows. Above the din rose the hoarse commands of the leaders, the ceaseless war-cries of the soldiers, and the terrible blast of the war-horns. Three times the Norman knights attacked the English line, and three times the English hurled them backward down the hill-side. William had two horses killed under him, and once the cry was raised that he was slain. But he cast back his helmet to show his face and rallied his men, crying, 'I am here safe and sound, and mean yet to win the day.' Finding that he could not break the English line by force, he ordered a party of his knights to pretend to fly. In the heat of the fray the Kentish men forgot their king's order and rushed after them, leaving the left of the barricade unmanned. The Normans soon turned on their pursuers, cut them down, and dashed past them on to the hill. The English had now to fight in the open. The Duke with his own hand slew Gurth, who had killed his third horse, and his knights cut down Leofwin. But Harold with his guard and the Londoners still stood firm. William now called up his archers and bade them shoot into the air, so that their arrows should fall on to the thick English ranks. As the English



needed both hands to swing their great axes they could not use their shields, and this shower of arrows killed many a good man. One arrow struck Harold in the right eye: he dropped his axe and leant in pain upon his shield. While the English ranks were thus shaken, William made a last charge, the wounded king was slain outright and his standard beaten to the ground. The leaderless English gave way at last and drew slowly off the hill. When they reached the marshy valley at the back of the hill they made their last stand. A number of Norman knights galloped against them, fell into the swampy ground, and were killed to a man. But it was too late to win back the day now. The Duke held the hill and the victory was his. So ended the most famous battle that was ever fought on English soil.

29. William crowned King of England, December 25, 1066.—Although Harold and his brother Gurth, and many more brave soldiers were lying dead at Senlake, if the English had joined together under a good leader, William would never have won the crown. But the nobles were too selfish to help or trust each other, and the boy Edgar, Edward's kinsman, whom they chose king at a meeting in London,

was too young to be of use. So all their plans fell through, and when William marched up from the coast weeks after the Battle of Hastings, there was no army to withstand him. He was able to stop all the roads to London, so that Edgar could get no help. Seeing the case was hopeless, he and his friends went out to meet William and offered him the crown. He welcomed them, went to London, and was crowned there on Christmas Day 1066; promising to rule his people as well as any king before him. Many English nobles and gentlemen now came and swore to be faithful to him, and those that had fought against him were allowed to pay a fine and keep their lands and goods. The poor and the clergy were not sorry to have a just and pious king. The people of the north and west, not knowing what to do, as yet neither took up arms nor agreed to William being king. All was quiet for the time; and the king, hoping things would go on well, went to visit his duchy, and see his wife and children. You may be sure the Normans gave him a hearty welcome home. There were splendid processions in the streets, grand feasts in the halls, and solemn thanksgivings in the churches. Every one marvelled at the ingots of gold,

the jewels and gems, the silver and ivory cups, the beautiful embroidered raiment and fine needlework that William brought from England. All, too, admired the handsome young English nobles he had in his train. Their long fair hair and moustaches, and the bracelets and gay dresses they wore were strange to the Normans; who, with cropped hair, shaven faces, and simple dress, looked to English eyes more like priests than knights.

**30. The English struggle against William for five Years, 1067-1071.**—But the King was soon forced to come back. He now found the task he had undertaken was harder than he had thought. It was not easy for him to keep his Norman followers from treating the English as a conquered nation and their wealth as fair booty. And though he tried to rule the English well, they began to think that they had given in too easily, and soon took up arms against him. For five years William had no rest; first he had to go west and take Exeter by force, then north to seize and garrison all the big towns there. Then he had foes from without to guard against; Harold's sons twice came with ships from Ireland and attacked the west; twice the Danes sent huge fleets to help the English rising in

the north-east. Again and again, in spite of all his promises, Malcolm, the Scots king, tried to seize Northumberland, and set Edgar (who had fled to his court and given him his sister Margaret to wife) on the English throne. Harold's sons were beaten off, and the Danes were bribed to go away. Then, angry at the revolts in the north, William hardened his heart, and had many miles of land along the Scottish border laid waste, so that Malcolm might not easily cross it. The poor people's sufferings were awful; homeless and foodless, many of them starved, some killed themselves in despair, others sold themselves for slaves to get food. For long years William's *Desert* lay wild and bare, where once towns and villages had stood. The last Englishman that held out against the King was Hereward, who built a fort at Ely, which in those days was an island in the Fens. But after many days William had a causeway made across the marshes, and stormed the fort. Hereward afterwards made peace with the King, became his soldier, and fought for him in France. William said that if there had been five men like him he never could have won England. There are many good stories told about Hereward's deeds.

31. What came of the Conquest.—After Ely was taken (1071) the English never rose again, for they felt that as they could not overthrow the King, it was best to serve him well and help him to rule. Most of the English nobles who had not fallen in the five years' struggle left England and went to the kings of other lands, or to the Emperor of Constantinople, and took service with them. Their lands were given to William's Norman and French knights and nobles, so that within twenty years of the death of Edward there was hardly a big landowner of English birth left in England. Though many of the newcomers married English widows and heiresses, they did not treat their farmers and labourers so well as the old landlords had done. They used the law to ill-treat them, made them build great stone castles, and pay heavy rents, so that there was much distress in the land. The English abbotships and bishoprics, as they fell in, were given to foreign priests. Some of these, like Lanfranc, who was set in Stigand's place as Archbishop of Canterbury, were good and learned men, and took care of the Church and the clergy; but others were hard and cruel. There were two Normans who would not share in the spoils of

England. One, a knight, said, 'I cannot take what Englishmen have better right to,' and went back to his Norman home. The other, a monk, to whom William had offered an abbotship, wrote, 'How can I preach to a people whose ways and tongue I know not, or do my duty among those whose kinsmen have been wrongfully slain, banished, or enslaved by my countrymen? When I look at this goodly England which you have won by the sword, I shrink from touching its wealth as I would from a hot fire. And I warn you, my lord, that you will have to give a strict account of this stewardship you have taken upon yourself.' William liked the honesty of these men, but he could not now draw back. The *conquest* brought much woe upon England, but it also did some good. Englishmen had more to do with foreign lands, and learnt much wisdom and many arts which they did not know before. Besides the castles, the Norman nobles and bishops built churches and halls and bridges of stone, and took care that the land was better tilled and drained than it had been before. Lanfranc ruled the Church well. He would not suffer any priest to be unlearned, or lazy, or careless of his work. Many Norman merchants and traders came to live in the English

towns which had suffered sorely in the wars, so that London and the bigger towns soon became flourishing again. The King was stern and laid heavy taxes on his people; but he kept up the good English laws, set just judges,



WILLIAM, HIS SON ROBERT AND GUARD.

and punished evil-doers. The earls and sheriffs had less power to do wrong than before, for William took care to see that they governed well.

32. William's Troubles. — William's last

years were not happy. The great King found out that the more power a man has the heavier is his burden of care. There were bad seasons, famines, and plagues in England. The Norman barons grumbled at his just rule, and wanted more power to ill-treat their English tenants. One of his sons was killed out hunting, the others quarrelled among themselves, and the eldest, Robert, whom he had set to rule Normandy, was lazy and careless and hot-headed. He wished his father to give him the dukedom to rule alone; but William said, 'It is not my way to take off my clothes before I go to bed,' and refused his request. Then the foolish young man got help from the Earl of Flanders, and the King of France, and the worst of the Norman knights, and made war against his father. There was a battle on the border, in which father and son met face to face, and Robert, not knowing his father, wounded him in the hand. Just then an arrow killed the King's horse, and he fell to the ground. A brave Englishman, Toky, brought him another, but was struck down by an arrow at the King's feet. William shouted to his soldiers, and Robert knew his voice, and repenting of his wickedness, knelt down and begged his father's pardon. The King was very angry at first,



but at last he forgave him, and peace was made.

**33. Doomsday Book.**—In 1083 William lost his much-loved wife, Matilda, and deep was his grief at her loss. Shortly after this great sorrow there was news brought that the Danish king and the Earl of Flanders had gathered a great army and fleet to invade England. William therefore sent abroad for soldiers, and so many men came over that it was wonderful how the land could feed them all. The coasts were wasted so that if the enemy landed they should find neither food nor lodging. But the fleet never set out, the Danes quarrelled with their king and killed him, and his great plan came to nothing. But great was the cost and the suffering that the threat of his coming had brought on England. So after William had sent home his soldiers, he called a council of his wise men, and tried to find out some plan by which he might be able to keep England safe without foreign soldiers. As he did not rightly know how many fighting men or how much income he had, he thought it well to send some of his clerks into every county in England, to see how much land and cattle every man had, what the worth of all was, and how much

income he could be sure of getting every year from taxes and rents. These clerks did their work so thoroughly that there was not an acre of ground or a head of cattle left out of their lists. These lists were all copied out into a big calf-skin book in two volumes called 'Doomsday Book,' which was laid before the King. From this book, which still exists, we learn great part of what we know about England in William's days. William then sent for all his knights and held a great review at Salisbury, where he made every one of them, whether they were his own tenants or those of his nobles, swear to be faithful to him against all his enemies. And this he did to prevent his nobles from making their tenants follow them, if they revolted against his rule.

**34. William's Death.**—In 1087 the King of France made war upon Normandy, and William went over sea with his army and carried fire and sword into France. He took a border town and set fire to it, for he was very angry with the King of France who had mocked him. As he rode among the ashes, his horse put his foot upon a burning beam and plunged suddenly, throwing William against the pommel of his high saddle and hurting him so badly that he was obliged to

be carried to Rouen, where he died six weeks later. When he felt that he was sick unto death, he sent for his three sons and told them the story of his life, warning them to take example by his sins and faults. Said he, 'When I think of my sins I am sore afraid. I have been a man of war from my youth up, and my soul is stained by the rivers of blood I have shed. I won a crown which none of my forefathers ever wore, by force of arms, not by right. Many guiltless folk have suffered distress and death because of me. But I have tried to rule rightly over the land I won by wrong, and set good rulers over the Church and the realm. The Lord, in whom I trusted, has been my helper all my life, and saved me from all my enemies. I have always worshipped him and striven to honour them that loved him. And now I pray you, my sons, to follow me so far as I have done uprightly, and to shun the sins into which I have too often fallen. Make friends of good men, follow their advice, uphold righteousness, be merciful to the poor and needy, and put down all unrighteousness and wickedness. Take heed to walk steadfastly in God's holy law whether your days be good or evil. I leave Normandy to my eldest son, for he is the

heir ; but I fear lest he rule it ill and suffer for his folly. I won the crown of England by the sword, and I dare not leave it to any one lest the anger of God fall upon him. But if my son William is chosen king, I pray God to bless him, for he has been always a



THE BACK OF THE SEAL OF WILLIAM.

good son to me.' Then Henry, the youngest son, said, 'What will you leave me, father?' 'Five thousand pounds,' answered the King. 'What can I do with it if I have no land?' 'Be patient, my son ; you shall one day have all the lands I ever ruled over, and be a

greater king than either of your brothers.' The dying King then blessed his sons, ordered all prisoners to be set free, and parted his treasure among the poor and the clergy. He lingered only a few hours more, and on Thursday, September 9, 1087, died with a prayer on his lips, as the great bell of Rouen Cathedral rang out for the morning service. They buried him at Caen, in the Church of S. Stephen's, which he had built.

**35. William's Character.**—You will like to know what manner of man this famous King was to look on. He was tall and stout, and so strong of limb that no man but himself could bend his bow. He was dark-haired, sharp-eyed, and strong-voiced. His features were good, but his look was stern. His hair was cropped close to his head, and his face shaven till he became King. His dress was always plain and neat. He was fond of manly pastimes, and, above all, of hunting. But he loved learning and learned men, and took care that his sons should be well taught. He was not easily moved to wrath or pity; but his anger was terrible, and his sorrow deep. One who knew him blames him for his selfishness in laying waste whole parishes and driving the villagers from their homes to make great

parks (such as the New Forest in Hampshire) for his hunting. He also tells of the cruel laws he made to punish those who killed game. But the same writer goes on to speak of the good order he kept in the kingdom. This King, he writes, was stern beyond measure to all that did evil or withstood his will, not even sparing his own brother Odo, whom he set in prison for breaking the law. And he sums up by saying that William was pious, charitable, kind to good men, a very wise and mighty man, and more powerful and highly honoured than any king that had gone before him.

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Of what you have read in this book, two things at least should be kept in mind. The first is that, in good King Alfred's lifetime, half of England and parts of Scotland and Ireland were *colonised* by Danes and Northmen. The second is that the descendants of the Northern sea-rovers, who settled in Normandy about the same time, came over to England five generations later, and won the English crown for their Duke William, turning out or slaying the English lords and gentlemen, and settling themselves in their places. So that

there must be many of us English and Americans of to-day whose forefathers were Northern sea-rovers, and we may look upon the Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes as our cousins across the North Sea.

## NOTE.

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SOME who read this little book may wish to know more about the lives and times of Alfred and William. As there are now free libraries in most large towns where historical works can be seen and read, I have set down here the names of three of the best old books about those kings, which have been translated into English :—‘The Old English Chronicle ;’ Asser’s ‘Life of Alfred ;’ Wace’s ‘History of the Dukes of Normandy.’ To these I would add :—‘The Bayeux Tapestry Elucidated,’ by Dr. Collingwood Bruce ; and Dr. E. A. Freeman’s ‘History of the Norman Conquest of England.’

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## SHORT TABLE OF DATES.

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	A.D.
Alfred born . . . . .	849
Alfred's first journey to Rome . . . . .	854
Alfred marries . . . . .	868
Alfred becomes King . . . . .	871
Alfred at Athelney . . . . .	878
Danes settling in England . . . . .	875 to 880
Alfred's death . . . . .	Oct. 26, 901
Rolf settles in Normandy . . . . .	911

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William born . . . . .	1027
William becomes Duke of the Normans . . . . .	1035
The first Norman Duke in South Italy . . . . .	1043
William fights at the Downs . . . . .	1047
William visits England . . . . .	1051
William marries . . . . .	1053
William fights at Varaville . . . . .	1058
William wins Maine . . . . .	1062
Harold visits Normandy . . . . .	1064
King Edward of England died . . . . .	Jan. 5, 1066
The Battle of Hastings . . . . .	Oct. 14, 1066
William crowned King of England . . . . .	Dec. 25, 1066
The first Norman Earl of Sicily . . . . .	1072
William's death . . . . .	Sept. 9, 1087

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